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United States Donates 12 Motorbikes to RSLAF for World AIDS Day

(FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE) – To commemorate World AIDS Day, the United States on Friday, November 30 donated 12 new motorcycles to the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces for use in its HIV and AIDS prevention program. The donation is through the U.S. Department of Defense HIV and AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP). The DHAPP started in Sierra Leone in 2002.

With the addition of the 12 new motorbikes, worth nearly \$34,000, DHAPP has donated 16 bikes total since the program started. Peer educators in RSLAF's HIV and AIDS prevention program will use the motorbikes to travel to military compounds and surrounding communities to provide information about HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

Besides training peer educators, DHAPP has funded support groups, laboratory upgrades, and prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

After a ceremonial ribbon cutting to give the motorbikes to RSLAF, U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone Michael Owen said the DHAPP program in Sierra Leone is among the best on the African continent and serves as a model for other nations wishing to provide education and treatment of HIV and AIDS to their militaries. He added that the role of RSLAF's peer educators is "vitally important" to help Sierra Leone achieve zero new infections, zero stigma, and zero AIDS deaths.

U.S. Defense Attaché Lieutenant James Ruffing encouraged RSLAF leaders to continue to set priorities and develop plans to lead, implement, and provide resources toward programs that fight HIV/AIDS. "Your leadership is essential for gains to be sustainable in the long term," Lt. Col. Ruffing said.

The event in Freetown followed statements from U.S. President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on November 29. In their statements, the president and secretary also emphasized that the path to an AIDS-free generation is a shared world responsibility.

The United States is the first and largest donor to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. To date, the U.S. has provided more than \$7 billion to the Fund, supporting 6.8 million people currently receiving treatment in low- and middle-income countries.

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